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Yule Halt In Raids Is Hinted

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KEY BISCAYNE, Fla., Dec. 22 — White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler hinted today that President Nixon may have an announcement shortly about a possible Christmas halt in the bombing of North Vietnam.

But when Ziegler was asked if the President was optimistic about an early end of the war, he replied only that the President was "determined" to do everything possible to bring about a negotiated settlement as quickly as possible.

The United States holds North Vietnam "responsible and accountable" for the proper treatment of prisoners of war, Ziegler said, adding that, "this includes responsibility" to see that they are kept out of the war zone.

Ziegler's comments came after a two-hour meeting the President had here with Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., deputy national security adviser, on the latter's trip to Southeast Asia.

National security adviser Henry A. Kissinger also attended the meeting at which the President heard Haig report on his quick trip this week to south Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand.

The general brought a letter to the President from South Vietnam President Nguyen Van Thieu in reply to a letter from Mr. Nixon which Haig carried to Thieu.

Ziegler declined to give any information on the meeting or to say whether Haig's report was encouraging or discouraging to the President.

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Possible Yule Halt In Bombing Hinted

BOMBING, From A1

Later today, both Kissinger and Haig left to spend Christmas with their families. There are no senior advisers to the President here now and none are scheduled to come here over the holidays.

Ziegler's hint of a statement on a Christmas halt in the bombing came when a reporter asked if the United States would observe a holiday truce.

The press secretary replied that he had no comment to make "at this time." He used the same phrase in reply to a similar question later but would not say when a statement might be issued. It was his understanding that South Vietnam would declare a Christmas truce, he said.

It was also considered possible that the United States would suspend the bombing over Christmas without making a prior announcement.

Under a barrage of questions seeking fuller information on the President's intentions, Ziegler maintained that the bombing was designed to prevent a buildup that would lead to another Communist offensive in South Vietnam.

He denied that the attacks on Hanoi and Haiphong were for "terror purposes." The President's policy was clearly stated in his May 6 address to the American people, Ziegler said, adding that he knew of no further plans for the President to speak to the nation or to clarify the situation with regard to the negotiations.

Asked whether the President knew for a fact whether an American prisoner of war camp in Hanoi had been hit by bombs, he said he did not.

In Washington, the Pentagon today rejected as "incorrect" a North Vietnamese charge that American bombs struck a prison camp holding captured U.S. airmen in Hanoi.

"On the basis of the best information we have, the allegation is not correct," Pentagon spokesman Jerry W. Friedheim said. Radio Hanoi first broadcast on Thursday its accusation that U.S. air raids caused damage to a POW camp.

The new Pentagon denial was stronger than the first re-

action Thursday night when a spokesman said, "We have not targeted any vicinity where we think prisoners might be held."

This left open the possibility of an accidental bombing, even though there was no deliberate targeting of any objective near a prison camp.

At today's briefing, Friedheim indicated that further checks had been made overnight, leading to his flat rejection of the charge.

When pressed to say whether the President was optimistic or pessimistic about a cease-fire in the reasonably near future, Ziegler replied that the President is "determined to take every step he can to move the situation to the point where a negotiated settlement can be achieved ... and bring the war to an end rapidly." The President's objective is to "achieve a peace that will last," he said.

But he added that "the next step is totally up to the North Vietnamese." If they negotiate in a constructive way "we can have a rapid settlement of the situation in South Vietnam," Ziegler said.

He declined to say whether the Haig trip to Saigon resulted in improved relations between Washington and Saigon. He emphasized, however, that communications between the two capitals are continuing on a regular basis.

The President believes that neither North nor South Vietnam "benefits by prolonging the negotiations or prolonging the war," Ziegler said.